

## Observation Tools

The tools included here are not all-inclusive. Seating charts can be used to collect just about any type of data desired. These are some foundational tools which you can build on or use in a variety of situations.

### **Selective Verbatim**

#### Purpose:

Determine what teachers and students say to each other and how they say it. It can refer to any aspect of talk which takes place in a classroom.

#### Procedure:

In pre-observation conference, select an aspect of classroom discourse to focus on (e.g., teacher questions, student responses, etc.). Observer writes down word-for-word only those aspects of classroom discourse.

#### What does it look like?

Observer writes down word-for-word only those aspects of classroom discourse identified in the pre-conference.

#### Data Analysis:

No ideal pattern of response exists. Each lesson, each teacher, and each group of students will create different patterns. Each collection of data will have to be analyzed in terms of the purpose of the observation and the desired results.

## **Verbal Flow**

### Purpose:

Find out who is participating in class and who is not by determining who says things and to whom. It provides one way of determining how classroom procedures inhibit, encourage, or allow students to participate in classroom interactions.

### Procedure:

Teacher (or observer) prepares seating chart of class in advance. Each student is represented by a box with his/her name. The teacher is at the top of the chart. Observer draws an arrow on the chart every time someone in the class asks a question or gives an answer.

### Caution

A single observation of verbal flow in a classroom discussion is insufficient to use as a basis for drastic changes in behavior. There is no reason to be concerned about how a teacher deals with the front of the room as compared to the back of the room if on succeeding days the pattern is reversed.

2 Verbal Flow inserts

## **At Task**

### Purpose:

Determine whether students are paying attention or doing what the teacher assigned (and which students are and are not) by noting which kinds of behaviors are actually happening. This technique demonstrates the effectiveness of engagement strategies and technology use.

### Procedure:

Teacher (or observer) prepares seating chart of class in advance. Each student is represented by a box with his/her name. Down the side of the box are numbers (one for each "sweep" of the class, up to 20). There is an empty box at the top of the chart for noting the beginning time of each sweep.

Observer sits at the front of the classroom and "sweeps" it by looking at each student in turn for just a few seconds (three to five), long enough to decide if he/she is . . .

#### **On task**

- A. Actively/overtly on task
- P. Passively on task
- H. Receiving help from teacher

#### **Off task**

- O. Overtly off task
- T. Talking
- D. Distracted/daydreaming

The corresponding letters are written in that student's box next to the number for that "sweep." Then the observer moves on to the next student.

### Cautions:

- "At task" needs to be carefully defined by teacher for observer before observation. It can't come down to the look on a student's face. Students are considered at task for this system unless they are overtly exhibiting behavior which indicates a lack of task orientation.
- A student could be talking to his neighbor and be very much at task.
- An observer should never have more than 10 categories by which to determine whether a student is at task. Too many categories dilute the usefulness of the data.

1 At Task insert

## Class Traffic

### Purpose:

Track the path of the teacher's movement around the classroom and discover which and how many students he/she interacts with (and which students are ignored).  
(Note: Especially suited to classrooms where there is a lot of teacher movement, e.g. small group work, science labs, tech ed classes.)

### Procedure:

Teacher (or observer) prepares a rough map of the class in advance. As the teacher moves around the room, the observer draws in arrows to indicate this movement. Whenever the teacher stops to interact with a student, the observer draws a circle at that spot and writes a number in it to show the sequence.  
(Note: It is possible to track students also.)

Legend	
XXXXXXXXXXXX	Directed student movement
-----	Purposeful student movement (non-directed)
→ →	Teacher movement (arrow indicates direction)
o o o o o o o o	Non-purposeful student movement
①	Student-teacher conference (number in circle Indicates sequence of conversations)

### Data Analysis:

The teacher should analyze the data from a class traffic observation with a number of questions in mind:

1. Was an area of the classroom or a specific student systematically ignored as the teacher moved about the classroom?
2. Similarly, were the students who received most of the teacher's attention given undue recognition?
3. Was there a pattern to the movement of either teacher or students that might be beneficial (worthy of repeating) or detrimental (worthy of thwarting)?
4. How does teacher activity relate to what the teacher wanted to accomplish?
5. How could results have been improved through changes in physical behavior of either the teacher or the student?
6. Were these data descriptive of today's behavior only or representative of the usual behavior of this teacher?

1 Class Traffic insert

## Interaction Analysis

This is probably the best known, most widely used and most thoroughly researched technique for recording interactions between teachers and students. It is based on the Flanders technique.

### Purpose:

Discover patterns of teacher behavior and speech (e.g., lecturing, questioning, and responding.)

Warning: This can become quite complicated! Because of this, some people prefer to use videotaping to collect these data.

### Procedure:

In a pre-observation conference, teacher and observer produce a category system appropriate to the teacher's style and concerns and what the teacher and students will be doing on the day of the observation.

For instance,

F = Expressing feelings

P = Giving praise

E = Giving encouragement

L = Lecturing

D = Giving directions

C = Criticizing

Q = Questioning

I = Sharing an idea

U = Using (an idea)

R = Restating a previously expressed idea

Make sure you don't use the same letter for two different categories.

Upper-case letters are used for the teacher; lower case for the students. For example:  
Q r Q i U i E i E

Time (hour and minute) can also be added to the sequence.

(9:15) Q r Q i U (9:16) i E i E (9:17)

The data can be recorded on a blank sheet, a seating chart or on a verbatim transcript. It can also be represented on a timeline if preferred.



## **Global Scan**

### Purpose:

The Global Scan provides an anecdotal record comprised of a series of brief notes on what the observer sees happening over time. It gives the "big picture" (to determine needs for future observations.) The Global Scan is different from Selective Verbatim in that the behaviors being observed don't have to be verbal.

### Procedure:

Using a "wide lens" without any particular focus, the observer records "everything" (of interest) that happens. He/she uses an anecdotal approach (short, descriptive sentences) to document classroom events. He/she tries to remain as objective as possible (e.g., "Mike is out of his seat. John is talking." not "This class is out of control!").

### Caution:

Due to the possibilities for subjectivity to creep into this technique, it is suggested that the teacher & observer are very clear during the pre-conference as to what data will be collected.